

16 April 1978

Ex-CIA official shares an adventurous career

Walters silent no longer

By CLAIRES EYRICH

Star-Telegram Writer

Gen. Vernon A. Walters was a silent witness to the terms of office of five U.S. presidents, from Truman through Nixon.

But he is silent no longer. Walters has told the story of his 35-year Army career and his role as deputy director of the CIA in a highly readable book, "Silent Missions" (Doubleday, \$12.95).

In Fort Worth to discuss his book, the affable and articulate observer of Eisenhower-through-Watergate talked about his reasons for writing about his unique career, more ongoing than anyone's with the possible exception of Averell Harriman but "above politics" and party-line distinctions.

"I had an adventurous career — and I wanted to share it with people," he says.

"All my life, I've kept diaries — ever since the age of 10. They were there waiting for me when I found out that I wanted to tell people what I believe in." His retirement in July 1976 as deputy director of the CIA as well as a member of the highest echelon of the Army, gave him the time to get it all together in a book that is fast-moving, persuasive and filled with the personality of a man who witnessed such highlights of history as Gen. Mark Clark's advance through Italy in 1944 (he was the general's aide) to Nixon's departure after Watergate (Nixon blamed the CIA).

BEING "MILITARY RATHER THAN political," Walters had never served with the CIA when he was sworn in as its deputy director on May 1, 1972, after serving with the Defense Intelligence Agency, which might be described as "a rival organization." He was the CIA's staunch defender in the efforts to discredit that organization in the backlash of Watergate.

Now retired and the owner of a house in Palm Beach, Fla., he swims, plays tennis and owns a boat. He takes

flying lessons and has bought a motorcycle — all things he wanted to do for years but was unable to, because of his tremendous work schedule. Last year, he went to Europe to revisit all the places he had known as a young boy, or had visited on military duty but had not had time to enjoy.

He speaks and travels a lot and has nothing to regret except that, when he bought his house in Florida, he had to remember what a group of terrorists could do to it, "one of the things one has to think of in the world today, regrettably."

He has been to Fort Worth previously, on a speaking trip, as deputy director of the CIA.

WATERGATE STILL DISTURBS HIM deeply, "because of the numerous cases of poor judgment" displayed by principals in that case. He worries, too, about "the immense Soviet military apparatus out there, and the invisible battlefield on which wars of the intelligence agencies must be carried on.

"Intelligence may be silent — but it's never quiet," he adds.

"Any society that will not defend its right to its intelligence agencies will not survive," he says.

He adds, with pride, that "not one of the 80,000 who passed through the CIA as officials and employees since its founding has ever been indicted for wrong-doing."

He was fondest of Eisenhower among the five presidents he served because of "the human factor. Eisenhower was a president who got all the government agencies to work together. Those were eight golden years," he says.

"But all five presidents were very considerable men — including Nixon" he says.

"I was very lucky; there were times when I might have been at cross purposes. And I was the only person directly involved in Watergate who was still there in the federal government three years later," he says.

NOWADAYS, WALTERS IS GIVING his attention to his writing. He has completed a novel, "Sunset in Saigon," which he describes as a story about "the boat people."

The third book, a collection of true anecdotes, will be about "the word people, the people who use words as their weapons." His title is "The Mighty and the Meek" and it will display the leaders he has served through anecdotal history, including "their qualities and defects." He will include both "famous and non-famous personalities."

Walters is "fortunate in being able to write everywhere or anywhere — the last four chapters of 'The Boat People' were written on the eight- or nine-hour flights between New York and wherever I happened to be going."

CONTINUE.

WALTERS STILL IS SOMEWHAT astonished by his he says. when he enlisted as a private in the Army in 1941, his most far-fetched ambition was to be a major some day.

"I got more than I bargained for — from private to lieutenant general in 35 years," he says. "Furthermore, I enjoyed the things that happened on the way."

He did not set out with an Army career — he went into his father's insurance business, handling claimants, but he knew it wasn't what he wanted to do with his life.

"Adolf Hitler got me out of that," he explains.

"My mother kept all my letters from overseas. When I got home, I read them all over again, and that's when I decided I wanted to remain in the Army," he says.

He served as interpreter to many a head of state. "I learned five languages, in Europe, by the age of five," he says.

"I've used all five of them consistently, and added three more.

"In the struggle for freedom, we've got to be able to communicate with other people who want to be free.

"We've depended on our immigrants and their children for too long. In the American education system, we see less and less emphasis on languages, yet we need these skills more than ever before.

"Once when the U.S. government sent me to talk to a group of terrorists, I saw them alone and unarmed in a hostile world. I studied their hopes, their poetry, their past. There were no further acts of bloodshed between us."

HIS FIRMEST BELIEF IS expressed in the words, "A nation that won't defend itself will lose its freedom."



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Vernon A. Walters
Lieutenant General, USA
Deputy Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear General Walters:

Your letter of March 26, 1976 was presented to our Board of Directors at their last meeting and the Board unanimously voted in favor of your being our guest speaker at our October 14, 1976 meeting. We definitely are interested in the man not the position.

We are looking forward to having you here and if there is any way in which we may be of service to you prior to your arrival please let us know.

Aloha,

John A. Baker, Jr.

JAB:ak

76-583/24

26 March 1976

Mr. John A. Baker, Jr.
President, Honolulu Council
Navy League of the United States
Box 4530
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

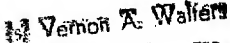
Dear Mr. Baker:

Thank you for your letter and your kind words regarding my talk to the Navy League. I am most grateful for your kind invitation to speak in Honolulu on October 14, 1976.

It is possible, however, that I may retire before that date and you might wish to have someone who would be in active government service at that time. If this is the case, I fully understand. If, however, you do wish me to speak under those conditions, I would be honored to do so. I hope that you will feel quite free to make the decision that seems best to you.

With every good wish,

Faithfully,


Vernon A. Walters
Lieutenant General, USA
Deputy Director

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